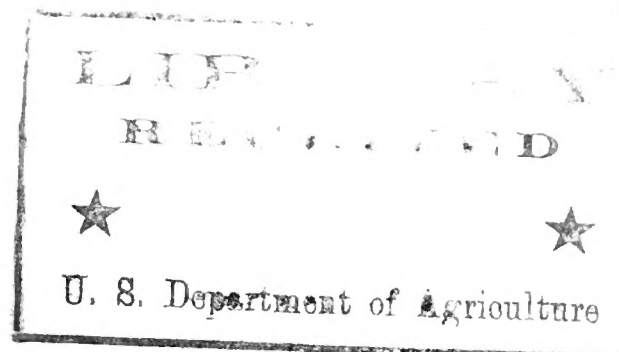


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# ANISE HYSSOP WONDER HONEY PLANT

By FRANK C. PELLETT

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**I**N the pioneer period of Iowa history there lived in Pottawattamie County a grand old man who was a beekeeper and horticulturist. He left behind him a record of achievement which insures that he will be remembered long after most men of his time are forgotten.

H. A. Terry was a pioneer in plant breeding and originated many new varieties of peonies at a time when there was little appreciation of his work. Now, however, lovers of the peony cherish his memory and many of his varieties are still in cultivation. Terry more than any other man of his time also originated more varieties of plums which are still planted in present day orchards.

Our interest, however, has to do with his beekeeping rather than his fruit and flower growing. The writer's attention was first called to a very desirable native plant through reading an article by H. A. Terry which appeared in the Beekeepers Journal in March, 1872. Terry was no careless observer and when he stated that in his opinion an acre of anise hyssop well established would be ample pasturage for 100 colonies

of bees, it demanded attention. He said that it produces honey in the greatest abundance which possesses in slight degree the same fragrance as the plant and renders it exceedingly pleasant to the taste.

Coming from a man whose work has stood the test of time and who is now recognized as having contributed substantially to pioneer plant breeding the statement convinced us that midwestern beemen have overlooked one of the finest sources of native bee pasture.

Immediately we sought to secure plants for the American Bee Journal honey plant test garden. The books state that fragrant giant hyssop or anise hyssop, (*Agastache anethiodora*) is found from Lake Superior and Manitoba to Nebraska and westward. When Terry lived in western Iowa it was so common that his bees harvested fine crops of honey but when we sought to find it no plants were to be found. Apparently it had disappeared completely from the region along with the Indian and the bison with which it had been associated.

It seems strange that our herb



Flower clusters of anise hyssop.

gardeners should have so completely overlooked this plant. The old world hyssop which has been cultivated for centuries has been brought to American gardens but this one which was so much loved by the Indians has been permitted to disappear almost completely from its native region.

From the leaves of anise hyssop the Indians made a beverage similar to tea although the taste is entirely different. We have made such a drink from it on several occasions and find that when properly made it is very pleasing. Because of their fragrance the Indians used the leaves also in seasoning other food much as our mothers used the garden sage. A remedy for colds was also prepared from this plant by the red men. It seems strange, indeed, that a plant with so many attractions should be permitted to vanish so completely.

A search of the catalogues failed to reveal a single nursery which offered it and none of the plant hunters with whom we were in touch

remembered having seen it. I had seen the plant in western Canada in 1925 when the beemen all the way from Winnipeg to Edmonton were getting crops of spicy honey from it in the woodland borders of the newly settled bush country. Letters to friends in that area brought replies which indicated that it has since disappeared from many neighborhoods there. Perhaps the settlers' livestock found the fragrant foliage so attractive that it has been destroyed by grazing animals.

Months passed before we could find the plant until finally a friend located it 180 miles north of Winnipeg. Twelve plants were dug for us but first they must go to the Canadian inspection service for examination to permit their export and from there they were sent for further examination to our own Department of Agriculture at Washington to secure permission for import. By the time all these journeys were completed and the plants arrived at





Anise hyssop in the honey plant test gardens.

Atlantic, Iowa, some were dead and others in weakened condition. It was late spring but a few of them thrived and the seed was carefully saved for the purpose of making increase enough to give the bees a chance to see what they would do with it.

It seeds freely but the seed is very fine and must be kept moist during germination and until the young plants are well rooted. Our first planting did rather poorly. The seed bed was well prepared and the seed sown on top of the ground leaving the rain to cover it. Frequent periods of

very dry weather resulted in a poor stand.

Our second attempt was much more successful. This time a good seed bed was prepared as before but after the seed had been sown we scattered a very light coating of straw over it to shade the germinating seed from the sun and to prevent the soil from drying out so quickly. This time the result was very pleasing. Thousands of young plants soon appeared and although there were times when there was serious lack of rainfall, they con-

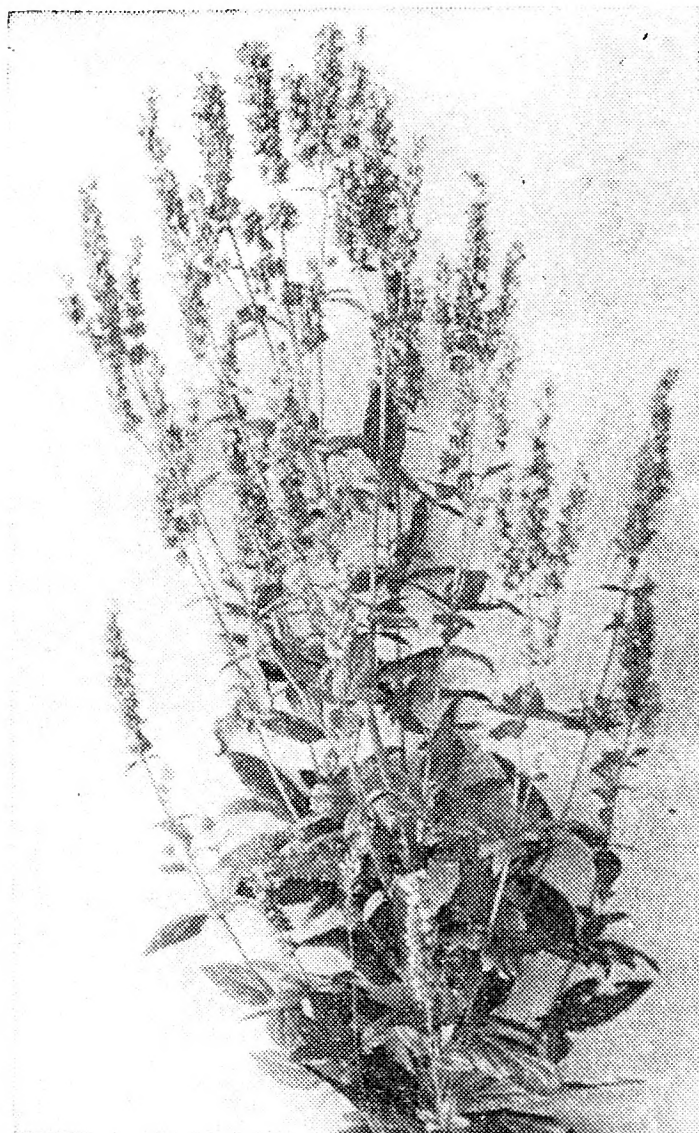
tinued to grow until we had a wonderful stand.

Among the hundreds of plants which have been tried in our test gardens there have been few which proved so attractive to the bees or which brought so many butterflies and other insects. Terry wrote more than sixty years ago that anise hyssop bloomed from early June until frost and our test plot verified all that he claimed for it. Bees began working on the flowers in June and there was still a scattering of flowers which the bees visited freely in early November, a period of about five months of continuous activity.

Referring again to its value to the bees, our plots are too small to permit any accurate estimate of its value. The bees do work it so vigorously that one cannot doubt that they are getting a substantial harvest. The long period of its bloom and the fragrance of its flowers and leaves certainly offer encouragement to plant more of it. Terry who had opportunity to observe it when it was still abundant placed it very high as a source of nectar. If his estimate was correct it must be equal to sweet clover as a source of honey and superior to most of the honey plants with which we are familiar. Terry stated that his bees worked it stronger than any other wild plant in Iowa in pioneer days.

Although he regarded it as worthy a place in any garden, the gardeners failed to appreciate it until now. Certainly in view of the great interest in herb gardening that has so re-

cently been revived there will be a demand for this finest of plants from the red man's herb garden. A plant that blooms for months and which at



An old plant of anise hyssop may have more than 100 flower clusters blooming at one time.

its best may have more than 100 flower clusters at one time as anise hyssop does, is certainly worthy of more attention than it has received.

**Seed of Anise Hyssop, 15c per packet**

**Plants 25c each; six for one dollar**

**PELLETT GARDENS : Atlantic, Iowa**